Proposed Operational Procedures for the National Technology Support Centers (NTSCs)

Guiding Principles for NTSCs

- Our top priority is providing service to the States and Pacific Basin and Caribbean Areas.
- NTSCs do not have an oversight function. We can assist with interstate consistency and quality assurance if requested.
- We will coordinate fully with State Conservationists and the Directors, Pacific Basin and Caribbean Areas and State-level technology leaders.
- No surprises – we will provide full notification of activities.
- We will maintain transparency of operations and availability of information.
- We will fully coordinate and share resources across NTSC support area boundaries and among various teams.

Operations

Initiating Assistance
We want to encourage free interaction between State-level specialists and NTSC specialists. However, we also need to ensure State-level leadership is involved and that information from assistance projects is made available to others. Assistance can be initiated in any of the following ways:
- Phone call to an NTSC specialist
- E-mail to an NTSC specialist
- Assistance request web site

Upon receiving a request, an NTSC specialist will begin to provide assistance (resources permitting). If the assistance will exceed approximately 12 hours of effort and a formal request has not yet been made, we will ask the State-level specialist to send a formal request for assistance through their State Conservationist/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area. This can be as simple as an e-mail from the State Conservationist/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area to the NTSC Director. At this point the assistance effort will also be tracked in TechSource, the Technology Assistance Information Source (see below).

Who to Contact
State specialists are encouraged to contact anyone in their servicing NTSC. Even if it is likely that the assistance will be provided by a specialist from another NTSC, State-level specialists should contact their servicing NTSC first. NTSC specialists will coordinate within the NTSC and with other National Centers and may refer the request to another specialist. Each NTSC will have a Technology Coordinator and this person should be contacted if the requestor is not sure who to call.

At the Start of Formal Assistance
For formal assistance projects (those exceeding 12 hours of effort) the NTSC specialist will offer to hold an entrance conference with the State Conservationists/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area and/or State-level technology leadership. This can be either a meeting if the assistance is onsite or a teleconference if the assistance is not onsite.

At the End of Formal Assistance
The NTSC specialist will offer to hold an exit conference with the State Conservationist/ Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area and/or State-level technology leadership. This can be either a meeting if the assistance is onsite or a teleconference if the assistance is not onsite. The NTSC specialist will prepare an assistance report documenting the initial objective, the result of the assistance, any issues encountered, and describing the solutions developed. As much as possible this report will be written to serve as a technology transfer vehicle for other States. The report will be sent to the State Conservationist/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area with copies e-mailed to the respective technology distribution list (i.e., State Conservationists/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area, State Resource Conservationists, and State Conservation Engineers). It will also be posted to the Technology Assistance Information Source (see below). Reports that contain potentially sensitive information will not be distributed without prior authorization from the State Conservationist/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area.

Transparency and Transfer to All States/Pacific Basin and Caribbean Areas
Each NTSC will prepare a quarterly report of activities. NTSC specialists will participate fully with and help develop communication networks among State-level specialists and among State-level interdisciplinary teams.

No Surprises
A courtesy notification will be provided to the State Conservationist/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area when an NTSC specialist will be visiting a State/Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area to work with agency partners (such as the USDA Agricultural Research Service or a university), beginning a major project with partners that the State Conservationist/Director, Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area may not be already aware of, or attending a conference or meeting (with the exception of NRCS business meetings and meetings such as with the Soil and Water Conservation Society and National Association of Conservation Districts).

Priority Setting
Each core team specialist will be responsible for evaluating and recommending the priority that is best assigned to various types of efforts. These recommendations will be coordinated with their counterparts in other NTSCs and with appropriate NTSC technology development teams and NHQ technology leaders. Input on priorities will be sought from State-level technology leaders. Overall direction will be guided by the Technology Advisory Board. Priorities, goals, and deliverables will be articulated in the annual NTSC Business Plan.

Advisory Boards
An Advisory Board consisting of four to five State Conservationists/Directors, Pacific Basin and Caribbean Areas and the NTSC Director(s) will be established. A draft Advisory Board policy is being issued under a separate national bulletin for review and comment.

Working Across Lines
It is important to encourage interaction across disciplines, ensure efficient use of resources among the NTSCs, encourage interaction and sharing of resources among NTSC technology

development teams and core teams, and ensure consistency of advice and technology among NTSC support areas. To support these goals we will:
- require interaction between core team members and NTSC technology team members;
- require interaction with State-level interdisciplinary teams in addition to State-level discipline specialists;
- keep other NTSCs informed of assistance requests and projects to avoid duplication; and
- cooperate and share resources across NTSC support area boundaries.

Technology Assistance Information Source (TechSource)
In order to promote efficient operations and the transfer of technical information, we will develop a computer application called the Technology Assistance Information Source (TechSource). TechSource will provide a way for all NRCS employees to obtain information about requests for assistance and the results of assistance projects. The information will be accessible through a Web interface with query and search capabilities. The system will allow technology leadership to evaluate the efficiency of technology support efforts, obtain information on the nature of technology assistance requests, and assess overall performance. The system will facilitate the preparation of quarterly NTSC reports.